

Dear Members of the Education Committee,

My name is Barbara Meyer-Mitchell and I am the proud parent of two students in Norwalk Public Schools. I have also served as Chair of the Finance and Facilities Committees for the Norwalk Board of Education, and currently serve as the President of the Norwalk PTO Council representing 21 school communities across our city. I am writing to you today to address the potential of H.B. 5283, which could ensure that students receive the full education funding they need to succeed and help our state succeed in the future.

In the last legislative session, Governor Lamont had proposed freezing phasing in the new ECS formula based on the uncertain economic situation at the time due to the pandemic. **Now that our state shows a surplus, I ask that the legislature and the Governor consider accelerating that ECS roll out and finally fully fund ECS once and for all.** Norwalk has overwhelming need, despite covering 85% of our education budget from local property taxes. We continue to struggle to support our Multi-Lingual Learners, and we have over 2000 students that have those needs. We continue to struggle to identify children with special needs and ensure we are in best compliance with the mandate of IDEA, which also continues not to be fully funded. We have a new facilities study that shows hundreds of millions of dollars of necessary repairs that our City CFO says we do not have the bonding capacity to meet. Every dollar spent on our operational side is a dollar we cannot use to pay for bonding for this important capital work. Norwalk needs the State to step up their financial support of our educational goals, which ultimately is a responsibility of the State of Connecticut. There should not be a \$5,000 difference in per pupil expenditure between my child's school in Norwalk and the school of my former bridesmaid's child next door in Westport. That is especially egregious, as our mill rate is HIGHER than theirs, despite the lower funding supplied to my child's school.

It is very obvious that there are serious, structural racial and economic disparities between different districts across the state. Norwalk has the energy and potential to continue to be a strong community and send excellent revenues to Hartford in the form of income and sales taxes from all our newly arrived residents who are based around the NYC economy. We simply ask that you help us retain residents by supporting our commitment to raising the level of our schools to be more equitable with those in the towns around us by **sending some of those revenues back to us.**

Norwalk has been struggling with school funding for the decade our children have been enrolled. Having gone back and read newspaper articles and minutes of Norwalk Board of Education and Common Council meetings, this has been the case for at least half a century. Our children, teachers, and families did not create the problem, but we are forced to try and solve it every year, like a bad scene out of the movie Groundhog Day. **Please don't wait until another generation of students have graduated to finally give our children the funding your new ECS formula says they deserve.**

Eventually, the extra federal funding that has hidden the problem during the last two years of crisis is going to run out. Norwalk will need to pick up the tab for at least \$7 million of salaries for social workers, school counselors and intervention specialists, and the need for these educators is even more urgent with the learning loss and isolation and trauma our students have

experienced. **We cannot wait for ECS dollars to be phased in over the next six years. Our priority is our kids, not property tax relief. Our priority is supporting teachers, not property tax relief.**

All of our students deserve to be funded based on what they need to be successful. English Learners, students who are economically disadvantaged, and students navigating through their education in communities that experience concentrated poverty all deserve to be funded at a level that compares to what their counterparts in “leafy” suburbs receive.

Sincerely,
Barbara Meyer-Mitchell
Norwalk CT